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Exploring Filipino Undergraduate Students' Perception on Social Media Usage for Online Learning During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a drastic shift in the education system around the world, with institutions suspending face-to-face mode of learning and switching to online learning. This sudden shift has forced the education sector to form alternatives by utilizing various online platforms as learning tools, particularly social media sites. The present study aimed to identify the role of social media in online learning and to explore the experiences of Filipino undergraduate students in using social media for online learning amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. One-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted across seven students from public and private universities in the Philippines. This qualitative study used thematic analysis for which results revealed that despite the benefits of using social media for online learning such as accessibility, convenience, and instant communication, students encountered many challenges in their online learning experience. Their work-life boundaries have also been disrupted due to their academic and leisure activities sharing the same space via social media. Despite these challenges, they felt that they had no choice but to accept the current situation. Overall, participants reported that the use of social media may be a good alternative for learning, but nonetheless considered as not entirely effective.

Keywords: social media, online learning, COVID-19 pandemic, undergraduate students, work-life boundaries

Introduction

Statistics have shown that there was a spike in social media usage during the COVID-19 pandemic. Aside from easing the loneliness felt by individuals due to the pandemic, social media has also been used for educational purposes (Greenhow & Chapman, 2020). This situation urged policymakers, deans, and leaders of education sectors worldwide to come up with and implement learning alternatives apart from the accustomed classroom setting of the education system (Sobaih et al., 2020) that is, to have a drastic shift of conducting classes from traditional face-to-face learning to online learning (Nadeak, 2020) and to adopt social media as educational tools (Lau, 2017). As a result, students have a high dependence on smart mobile

phones as they utilize them for both education and societal activities at the present time (Agarwal & Alrowaili, 2020).

Online learning refers to a type of alternative learning that utilizes internet connection and online platforms (Nadeak, 2020). It mainly focuses on its accessibility, flexibility, and ability to bring up various types of learning interactions and new teaching methods (Nadeak, 2020; Toquero & Talidong, 2020). Accessibility is obvious, as online classes can be attended from the student's home rather than an institution of learning. For the same reason, this also provides a measure of affordability and flexibility by placing fewer restrictions and requirements upon students in areas such as travel, materials, accommodation, and associated costs (Dhawan, 2020). Implementation of online learning requires devices such as smartphones, tablets, or laptops. Virtual classes can be held through Google Classroom, Canvas Instructure, and so on. Moreover, online learning can be conducted through diverse social media platforms (Nadeak, 2020). With this, various academic institutions invested on online platforms for formal education to continue despite the pandemic (Mishra et al., 2020). Universities and other schools in the Philippines have also considered using Facebook as a supplementary medium for distance learning, especially because a great number of students in the country use the said application (Toquero & Talidong, 2020).

Social media refers to "any number of technological systems related to collaboration and communication" (Tess, 2013). In an academic setting, Facebook, WhatsApp, and Youtube are some of the platforms that are most commonly used for learning purposes (Sobaih et al., 2020). Platforms like Facebook and allow users to exchange messages in the form of texts, audios, videos, and to create group chats (Agarwal & Alrowaili, 2020; Mishra et al., 2020). Meanwhile, Youtube allows both teachers and students to upload and view supplementary educational videos.

Both teachers and students were forced to rely on the Internet, particularly by utilizing social networking sites (SNS) to communicate about academic-related matters as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic (Lau, 2017; Sobaih et al., 2020). Previous studies revealed that the use of social media for academic purposes can enhance students' self-management because of its "unstructured, rule-free, and even chaotic" environment (Borštnar, 2012) and helps in increasing their academic performance and engagement (Ansari & Khan, 2020; Sobaih et al., 2020). Various platforms allow them to explore learning sources and maintain virtual relationships with others to alleviate the quarantine boredom. Previous studies concluded that social media usage for learning has enhanced communication between students and teachers and has increased opportunities for collaborations, rapid sharing of resources, and more (Lau, 2017). Although there are several physical limitations, numerous studies discovered that smartphones and social media have provided students an exemplary educational and learning opportunity associated with academic collaboration, course content access, and tutorial privileges (Ansari & Khan, 2020).

On the other hand, there have been concerns about using social media for learning (Greenhow & Chapman, 2020). As for educators, they recognized the possible significant use of SNS for academic activities. However, there are several challenges making its practical implications at minimal level which include digital division, security and rapport, control and monitoring, institutional support, and teachers' expectation on the appropriateness of its use (Sobaih et al., 2020). When students cannot understand the lessons without the verbal explanation from the teacher, virtual communication with them via instant messaging applications can be challenging (Nadeak, 2020). There is a decrease in cognitive engagement among students, particularly in terms of knowledge or learning, concentration, level of engagement, class attendance, and interest (Aguilera-Hermida, 2020). Students frequently find it difficult to focus on online lectures for about one-third of the lecture time as they have a high likelihood to misuse it for entertainment during lectures (Agarwal & Alrowaili, 2020; Nadeak, 2020). Another concern from the students is its effects on their study time, wherein using social media as a tool for learning consumes more time and causes information overload (Agarwal & Alrowaili, 2020; Tess, 2013). This has also brought a negative impact on mental health as past studies show that students who are enrolled in online courses tended to have significantly higher levels of technology-related fear, anger, and helplessness (Händel et al., 2020). Furthermore, combining socializing, learning, and leisure time could cause conflicts between students' and teachers' goals (Greenhow & Chapman, 2020).

Students believe that social media sites like Facebook are solely intended for communication and maintaining relationships, thus wanting to separate their source of pleasure, which is their social life, from their source of displeasure, which is their student life (Nadeak, 2020; Tess, 2013).

Händel and colleagues (2020) discovered that students were generally ready for digital learning. However, in terms of their socio-emotional experiences, results significantly varied. There is a growing concern about the validity and retention of information gained through social media that has not been vetted by education officials (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016; Sleeman et al., 2020). Another issue is that through online classes, the distinction between formal, informal, and social media learning is becoming less well-defined and could be indicative of an upcoming paradigm shift (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016).

Previous research have focused on the effectiveness and perception of students in online learning and the use of social media, but these studies were published prior to the pandemic (Hrastinski & Aghaee, 2011; Borštnar, 2012; Tess, 2013). It also has been explored how social media usage in the workplace affects employees (Walden, 2016). Employees feel distracted from accomplishing their tasks, disturbed from their privacy, aggravated from their work-life balance upon incorporating the use of social media in the workplace. Though it is unclear if students currently enrolled in online classes experience the same challenges faced by employees, recent studies also revealed that there is an increased use of social media among students for the purpose of collaborating and information sharing (Drouin et al., 2020; Sobaih, et al., 2020).

The study seeks to understand the experiences of Filipino undergraduate students in using social media for academic purposes in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. This involves how undergraduate students use social media in receiving school announcements from their administration and class announcements from their professors. It also includes how students use social media for collaboration, inquiries, and other school-related tasks assigned to them. The study particularly aims to describe the perceptions of the undergraduate students in using social media before and during the online learning arrangement due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The two main research questions are the following:

1. What is the role of social media in online learning?
2. What are the experiences of undergraduate students in their social media usage before and during online learning in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic?

The findings of this study may have compelling impacts in society, particularly in the Philippine setting, as the majority of schools and universities have already adapted alternative learning methods during the COVID-19 pandemic, primarily various social media platforms for teaching and learning. The study can also provide institutions, school administrators, and teachers with a holistic and comprehensive understanding of the current situation that students are dealing with on a daily basis in order for them to construct a more effective learning environment and implement appropriate school policies accordingly. Furthermore, exploring students' experiences and challenges in online learning helps researchers and other parties involved to discover underlying issues and topics that still need in-depth investigation.

Methodology

Research Design

This qualitative study is phenomenological in nature, as the goal of the research is to find out the perceptions of the target demographic without having any preconceptions or assumptions. This design allows the researchers to describe in depth the experiences of Filipino undergraduate students when it comes to using social media for online learning.

Data were gathered by interviewing participants about their feelings and perceptions towards social media being used as a tool for online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The collected data were then analyzed in a qualitative manner, and the participants' statements were evaluated according to the research questions and aims of the study. The following sections of this paper provide a more detailed explanation of the research methodology.

Sampling

Convenience sampling was initially conducted to gather a pool of participants from different undergraduate schools. Then, purposive sampling was conducted to select a total of seven participants for the study. The inclusion criteria were the following: (1) undergraduate students from public and private schools in the Philippines; (2) undergraduate students within the age range of 18 to 22 years old; (3) have been using social media prior to the pandemic; (3) those who use social media to collaborate about group work or talk about schoolwork; (4) those who use social media to receive announcements concerning school and classes; (5) those who use social media to communicate with their professors. The exclusion criteria were the following: (1) undergraduate students who filed a leave-of-absence to their respective schools due to the online learning arrangement in the middle of a pandemic; and (2) have not completed full online classes for at least half of an academic term. The researchers utilized this sampling method to effectively select individuals who are best appropriate to the criteria for the purpose of the study.

Measures

An in-depth one-on-one semi-structured interview was conducted for this study via the Zoom application. Conducting this kind of interview can help the participants have more freedom in expressing their thoughts in relation to the questions posed by the researchers. The interview questions that guided the conversation with the participants were open-ended and revolved around exploring undergraduate students' experiences in using social media for online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Such questions allowed new ideas relevant to the study to be brought up and explored even further. These also helped the researchers probe deeper into the participants' insights, perceptions, and feelings regarding the topic.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to find patterns and interpret the data collected from the participants. This process involved coding the responses from the participants and categorizing them into appropriate themes that fit the aims and address the research questions of the study. The categorization of the data was done in accordance with the patterns and similarities observed between the answers of the participants.

A semantic approach was also used to analyze the data from the participants, as there is more emphasis on the explicit feelings and perceptions rather than the answers' underlying social and psychological factors. Through an inductive method, the themes generated from the analysis were used to address the research questions of the study. A total of eight themes were created based on the responses of the participants.

In analyzing the data, the criteria for trustworthiness was observed. To ensure the data's credibility, other researchers within the group checked the transcripts for accuracy. For transferability of study findings, the researchers articulated details gathered from the participants, such as the context and characteristics. Verbatim quotes from the interview were also included to help the readers obtain a clearer understanding of the research problem and assess how the findings can be generalized to other situations or contexts.

Results and Discussion

Seven undergraduate students were selected to participate in the study. In particular, there were four private and three public undergraduate students. All of them study in universities based in Metro Manila. They belong to varying programs, from STEM to liberal arts degrees. Based on their year level, there were one freshman, one sophomore, and five junior undergraduate students. Four undergraduate students have experienced online learning for two terms while the other three have completed one term. Their ages range from 20 to 21 years old, with three of them being 20 years old and the other four being 21 years old. Among the seven participants, only one was male.

Through thematic analysis, a total of eight themes were identified to address the research questions of the current study. These themes were further categorized into several subthemes to present the data in a more comprehensive manner.

Theme 1. Role of Social Media Before Online Classes

Information Gathering

Social media has been a good platform for the participants to gather information such as current events, local and international news, and trends. P1 said, "I use social media for general information and news in domestic and international affairs."

These platforms are described as essentials in knowing updates from friends and family. P4 shared, "It's where I get information kung anong business ng friends ko, usually to be updated with recent news."

Participants also reported that they use these social media platforms as sources of inspiration for personal endeavors and were used for things external to academic life. P4 shared, "Twitter is usually a source of inspiration for art for me," while P3 commented that they use social media to "look up news and watch non-school related stuff on YouTube."

Another participant shared that aside from the aforementioned functions of social media, they also use it for freelancing, internship, and self-expression. P5 shared,

> I use social media for freelancing, I guess because I'm a freelancer either. And also, before online classes, I use it recently for media monitoring since I did an internship with a news company before online class started…or just to express myself.

Socialization

For most of the participants, social media has become beneficial particularly for people in distant locations because it allows people to communicate, keep in touch, and be updated with each other. This includes family and friends. P1 said, "Benefits of using it include being able to interact and connect with friends and being able to have conversations with various people."

Leisure

Social media was purposefully used for leisure and recreation before the pandemic happened, in which online classes became the new normal. According to P3, they used social media

before "mostly for chill time, take a break, scroll through FB, Twitter."

P2 also mentioned how the usage of social media differed from when online classes were not yet the current setup. They said, "And then yung Instagram, for entertainment 'yan, tsaka yung Pinterest… mas mataas 'yung percentage ng pang-entertainment before ng pandemic."

Theme 2. Role of Social Media During Online Classes

Communication with Classmates and Professors

The participants agree in terms of using social media platforms for the sake of connecting and talking to their classmates and professors. Some have shared how this affected their work since not everyone is reachable, such group meetings where some are absent. Additionally, some professors tend to post announcements past the normal working hours. P5 said,

> You can get a message from your professor at least 12 in the midnight and I've had an experience with that wherein I had to communicate with my professor at around 1 AM. Personally I'm hesitant to do that because it's outside office hours and you would want to build a social media etiquette, especially now that we're in an online learning setup.

Aside from this, groupworks have been the general answer of the participants upon being asked how they use social media for online learning. The platforms they often utilize for group meetings include Messenger, Zoom, and Facetime. P4 said, "Sa Messenger lahat ng mga group chats for group works."

Although there was not much difference between face-to-face classes and online learning, P3 brought up the discomfort they felt with the idea of using social media for groupworks, particularly for working with group members they do not personally know. P3 explained, "Medyo weird lang, kasi mga strangers, 'di mo sila kakilala pero aadd mo sila sa Messenger kasi you have to do group works."

Information Dissemination

Participants thought it was convenient to stay connected with classmates and professors through social media platforms, especially in terms of queries, clarifications, and accessibility. According to P5, it is easier to disseminate information using these platforms. They shared,

> In [participant's school], we use Facebook in our history class. And then we also use Facebook in my chemistry class, particularly the lab component, just to make information dissemination easier.

Additionally, P5 mentioned that they use social media to "communicate with my other classmates in terms of updating ourselves on what tasks we need to do."

P3 also explained how some professors prefer to update their students and be reached through social media platforms, especially Messenger. They said,

> Kapag may quiz kami, sesend ng professor sa Messenger so you really have to keep it at arm's length. Kailangan open Messenger kasi baka may last-minute corrections sa directions. And if you have questions, we ask profs through social media.

Theme 3. Effects of Using Social Media for Online Learning

Attention Span

Social media has negatively affected the attention span of the participants because it serves as a distraction in online learning. In some cases, participants get a lot of notifications from various platforms like YouTube, or they randomly receive messages via Messenger while studying or attending online classes.

Other distractions in taking online classes came from environmental factors such as background noises, which also cause a decrease in their attention. P2 said, "May online class kayo kaso 'yung environment mo may mga unnecessary noise so nababawasan 'yung attention natin."

Increased Stress Levels

Social media platforms were viewed as outlets to relieve stress and to relax. However, as a result of merging these platforms with online learning, participants reported that the use of social media for online learning takes away their mode of destressing and instead heightened their stress levels. Furthermore, stress can be brought by the pressure of maintaining good grades despite the shift of learning modes. For instance, P2 said, "Na-stress din talaga ako nun kasi kailangan mag-keep up sa grades kaso iba nga 'yung mode of learning ngayon."

Time Consumption

Some participants reported that the time consumed in online classes and other academic-related activities greatly increased as compared to prior the pandemic.

One participant experienced having long periods of classes lasting for two to three hours, which caused fatigue and sleepiness. P6 shared, "Matagal 'yung mga klase namin eh, three hours kasi per subject. Tapos most sa kanila two hours mag-lecture kaya after class, nakakapagod. Aantukin na ako."

Some participants also worried about how much time they spend on social media as it is easy to browse and get lost with all the content available, and the addition of academic matters accessed through social media may have worsened the situation. P7 commented, "Ang dali-dali lang kalimutan nung ginagawa mo tapos madadala ka dun sa pag-scroll mo sa social media, tapos di mo na mamamalayan na ilang oras na pala 'yung nasayang mo."

Disruption of Work-Life Boundaries

Most participants revealed that the current situation and learning setup caused little to no work-life boundaries, especially with social media usage becoming saturated with school-related content and activities. Such a dilemma is brought by instances such as YouTube being currently used to watch lesson tutorials rather than viewing entertaining content. Additionally, platforms like Facebook and Twitter were previously used to relax or spend their free time, but these are now also used for academic purposes. As such, participants experienced difficulty in determining a fine line between using social media for online learning and using it for their private lives.

P7 reported, "Hindi mo mahihiwalay 'yung

social media entertainment from online learning nga kasi you access them from the same gadget, same device, or same internet. Walang boundary."

One participant also shared their feelings regarding the disruption of their work-life boundaries. P3 said, "When I open YouTube or like Facebook, parang lahat na lang school-related and di na ako makahinga." In terms of using other social media sites for school such as Messenger, they also disclosed that it felt "very weird and uncomfortable" because the application is for more intimate relationships, and not for submission of requirements.

Increased Dependency on Social Media

Most of the participants became more dependent on social media in order to keep up with both their private lives and academic activities. One participant reported that almost everything they have to do is already on social media. Another stated that the usage of various social media platforms for online class depends on what the professor prefers to use. Hence, the participant and the rest of the class had to use several online platforms and were obliged to check them on a daily basis.

P3 said, "Parang mas invested na ako sa social media compared to before. Mas dependent na rin, which I don't like and almost everything I have to do, with school and friends, nasa social media."

Furthermore, apart from academic and entertainment purposes, some participants are more inclined to use social media as a way of perceiving and connecting with the world. P7 commented, "Social media is really a big part in seeing how the outside world is. Ngayon, I have to connect with them through online lang talaga. So mas nagiging dependent ako sa kanya ngayon."

Theme 4. Experiences on Using Social Media for Online Learning

Adjustment to Online Learning

Although the study is concentrated particularly on the use of social media for online learning, participants still conveyed their experiences in adjusting to online learning in general. Participants reported initially experiencing difficulties in transitioning from conventional face-

to-face classes to online learning. Due to constraints placed by the pandemic, they submitted themselves into this mode of learning because it was perceived as the most convenient means of resuming education in this situation. P2 commented, "Nung first part pa lang ng online class, oo nahirapan talaga ako mag adjust noon."

Problems with Time Management

There have been problems with how students manage their time. A participant was sleepy and exhausted after two hours of lecture that the planned activities after were not carried out. P6 said, "Most sa kanila two hours something mag-lecture kaya after class, nakakapagod. Aantukin na ako, ganon. Eh may pinaplano akong mga activities after that, so hindi ko na nagagawa. Tapos parang namimismanage ko 'yung time ko in a way."

Time spent on social media also fluctuated in extreme ends that led to problems with time management. P1 added, "Compared to before where I would use it regularly but sporadically, during online learning, I would either use it for hours on end or not use it at all in a day."

Reluctance from Using Social Media

Participants also revealed a reluctance of using social media for online learning. There are expressions of dislike and weariness in using social media. Moreover, social media is viewed as an alternative medium for online learning. P3 also shared,

> It's not very effective but it's working in a way. But I don't think I'm learning that much compared to regular school na physical school. But we can't really do anything now since pandemic. But at least there is an alternative.

Although another participant also considered it as an alternative medium, he is "okay" with it. P2 shared, "Nakakatulong talaga siya lalo na ngayon. Ito talaga 'yung best alternative mode of learning kaya okay siya sa'kin."

Additionally, one participant did not state any personal challenges in using social media for online learning but is aware that others experience difficulties. When asked about whether he encounters challenges, P6 answered, "Ako hindi, but my classmates do." Later on, P6 added,

Ako kasi, we make sure na may enough internet kami sa mga dates [*of synchronous meeting*] na sinabi. Ako naman wala naman akong problema kasi may WiFi kami. So, I think, dun palang nawala na 'yung difficulty ko on my part.

Changes in Perception and Attitude

There were several changes in their perception and attitude on how they used social media. A participant became more patient when waiting for other people's replies instead of feeling annoyed with the lack of response. P6 said,

Ngayon siguro, 'yung attitude ko since may mga online learners kasi na napunta sa online learning na walang capacity or walang gadgets, walang proper internet connectivity. So siguro 'yung attitude ko when using social media ngayon, mas naging patient ako. Dati kasi pag may nagchachat sa akin, naiinis ako kapag hindi nagseseen agad, and such, ganun. Ngayon mas patient ako sa kanila.

Another participant noticed a preference for scrolling through websites when the day ends rather than checking their phone every now and then.

A participant also started limiting their usage of social media and performing other recreational activities. They learned to manage their time well by focusing on one task at a time. They added, "Mas naging aware ako sa paglilimit ng oras sa paggamit dahil nga parang masyado nang exposed ako sa social media lalo na ngayon na hindi tayo nakakalabas."

Theme 5. Advantages of Using Social Media for Online Learning

Affordance and Accessibility

Several of the participants generally felt that using social media was convenient for their online learning. They can communicate much faster with other people due to the accessible nature of social media, as well as its ability to quickly notify people of updates. One participant shared that using social media sites like Messenger makes it easier for them to talk to classmates and professors and receive replies from them instantly. They contrasted

it with the experience of communicating through emails, wherein it does not have a feature that lets people know if the recipient has already read their message.

Some participants also noted that collaborating with their peers in school in the midst of a pandemic was also more convenient due to easier access to social media sites such as Facebook. P2 said, "Okay lang magset ng meeting agad kasi lahat naman may ganun [social media]. Di katulad ng physical, minsan 'yung iba hindi pa available." Similarly, some participants thought that using social media for online learning helped them learn more information from and exchange ideas with their classmates in relation to their online lessons.

All of these benefits experienced from using social media for online learning were made possible because the participants had the means to afford the necessary resources for it. However, they also acknowledged that not everyone has the same experience as them.

Theme 6. Disadvantages of Using Social Media for Online Learning

Troubles Communicating with Classmates

Some participants faced difficulties when contacting their classmates for their online classes, especially for those that involve group work. Common reasons cited for these difficulties are their classmates' unresponsiveness on social media, as well as internet connectivity issues. P2 shared, "'Yung iba nga lang hindi rin ganun ka-responsive kaya mahirap rin pag naka-group mo 'yung mga 'yun. Kasi meron din akong mga classmates na nasa province hanggang ngayon mahirap signal, o tamad lang talaga."

Additionally, establishing rapport with classmates they have never met prior to online learning was also challenging for some participants. It was difficult for them to gauge how to approach them especially when the information they only have of their classmates are their names and profile pictures.

Troubles Communicating with Professors

The participants had varying unfavorable experiences when it comes to communicating with

their professors online. Some of them reported that their professors are not responsive enough whenever they have to raise concerns about their classes. P3 revealed:

> May group GC with prof. Nagsabi kami na nagclose and hindi naaattach [solutions]. Tapos sabi niya send na lang daw through PM sa Messenger. Nakita na lang niya solution ko after three months, tapos hindi ko rin naman siya ma-chat kasi hindi naman kami friends ng professor so hindi ko siya mabulabog na 'Pakicheck naman po solutions ko, sir.'

On the other hand, P3 also felt that because of the nature of using digital platforms for learning, professors expect their students to always be available online at any time of the day. They said, "24/7 nasa computer ka na pero at the same time downside parang ineexpect ng profs 24/7 pwede ka."

Distractions

Having only one device or platform both for online learning and communication has become a source of distraction for a few participants, particularly when it comes to receiving pop-up notifications on their device while they are in class or while they are doing academic requirements. Regarding such distractions, P3 mentioned, "Mas distracting since naka-mixed nga siya. Minsan may nagpopop out sa YouTube na notification or like may magchachat sayo randomly sa Messenger."

Issues with Internet Connectivity

Some participants also reported that having intermittent internet connection during synchronous sessions, whether on their part or their classmates, became an obstacle in effectively understanding their professors' online lectures. P6 explained,

> May mga times na hindi talaga kami nakakatapos ng class kasi maraming pawala-wala [due to internet connection issues]. Tapos next class, they repeat the lessons again kasi nga may mga nawawala the previous class. So ayun, hindi maayos 'yung flow nung klase tapos nadedelay 'yung mga lectures, mga modules, hindi nasusundan.

Function of Social Media Unsuitable for Online Learning

Some participants mentioned that their schools have already established online platforms that are exclusive for their online learning. Despite this, they still have professors who prefer using social media over utilizing the school's learning management system (LMS). This kind of experience made some participants feel confused because a few of their professors use such platforms to communicate with their students or to let them submit academic requirements. P3 shared their sentiments about this situation. "Meron namang perfectly good platform where we could upload our files but I don't understand why we have to send our files in Messenger when we have our online learning platform," they said.

Theme 7. Coping Methods

Using Other Social Media Platforms

Students have resorted to using social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Instagram) or online streaming services (e.g., Netflix) that are neither related nor connected with their online learning in order to alleviate their feelings of stress and improve their mood. P6 said, "Yung mga ginagamit ko 'yung mga walang connection sa academics. Those are what I used to cope—Twitter, Instagram. But mostly videos as well—YouTube, Netflix. During non-working hours, I try my best to destress through those platforms."

Setting Boundaries

Students set boundaries between their personal and academic life as a means to cope from their difficulties. They created separate social media accounts specifically for personal and academic use. P6 mentioned,

> I separated my accounts. Gumawa ako ng account for personal or for family use. Kasi nga napansin ko "Hala nagkakagulo na 'yung messages ko sa group chat." If family, tapos may mga group chat, dahil dun natatabunan 'yung ibang messages. Hindi ko na-papriorize 'yung ganito, 'yung ganyan.

In addition, they also made separate email accounts for different purposes, such as work,

organization, and school. They set boundaries with their time as well by constructing a schedule that would simulate office or working hours. A participant also considered sending and replying to messages within office hours as a form of social media etiquette.

Acceptance of the Current Situation

Students believe that they have no choice but to accept their current situation, despite protests against the usage of social media for online learning. As P6 has described,

> Wala naman tayong choice kundi gumamit ng social media pagdating sa online learning. So kami, wala kaming choice kundi magrely sa social media, and majority naman ng online learners ngayon sa social media nagrerely.

Participants recognized that as professors and other students use social media, social media is now an unavoidable part of a student's day and all that they can do is simply comply with the requirements given to them. While they may wish to take a break from social media, they felt that they are unable to because of the online learning set-up and the pandemic.

There is also a tone of resignment in students who are required to use social media in order to keep up with their academics. As P4 has stated, "What else can we do anyway? You know you're stuck at home; there's only so much you can do when you're stuck at home."

Eliminating Distractions

Students eliminated distractions that appear in social media platforms which could divert their attention away from online learning. One participant muted their notifications from non-relevant group chats except for the current subject during class. They also turned their video to full screen size so that they could prevent themselves from seeing other things that could take their attention away from the recorded lecture. Some participants also tried to build habits to prepare themselves for class, such as not using their phone during lectures, waking up early to attend classes, and using applications (e.g., Forest) that can help them monitor their social media usage.

Time Management

One participant realized that he had to learn how to manage his time now compared to before because of how things have merged together in online learning. Another participant mentioned that attending to tasks one at a time instead of doing multiple things simultaneously can help more in completing tasks. Synchronizing their schedule and setting a time to work together in group activities also helped in making the workload more manageable.

Theme 8. Overall Judgment of Undergraduate Students

The general consensus among the students who were interviewed is that while learning is available through online means like social media, it does not yet seem to be in a state that is viable as a primary means. It simply remains an alternative due to the difficult circumstances faced at this time. Some participants were "not a fan in learning through social media," but others found it convenient.

While there may be positives, P2 was also aware that the current setup is not ideal for every individual that may need to make use of it.
P2 stated,

> Okay naman siya. Nakakatulong talaga siya lalo na ngayon, ito talaga 'yung best alternative mode of learning kaya okay siya sa'kin pwera lang sa iba na hindi talaga kaya
> kasi walang gadget, mahina signal lalo na sa mga province. Pero 'yung nandito taga-Manila, mas naging convenient 'yung paggamit nito.

In summary, the results of the study revealed that despite the benefits of social media usage for online, the participants faced plenty of challenges in their online learning experience. This may be due to the sudden and forced implementation of online learning across all schools in the Philippines when the COVID-19 pandemic started. Students and teachers alike are unprepared for the sudden shift of mode of learning, and some of them do not have the means to access the needed resources for it. This was evident in the reports of the participants regarding internet connectivity problems. Despite these difficulties, the participants felt that they had no choice but to accept the current situation and adapt to it. Such attitudes may have stemmed from their judgment that while social

media usage for online learning is not the most effective way for them to learn, it is currently the only alternative available to them.

The study also aimed to identify the role of social media in online learning. Results revealed that its functions before and during the pandemic are generally the same except for leisure. The participants' view about social media being used to socialize with various people has not changed even as the pandemic began, but they disclosed that the need to communicate with their classmates and professors has significantly increased since then. Moreover, the recreational purposes of social media have lessened due to social media being currently used for online learning as well. Participants now prefer to use other online platforms for leisure activities, specifically those that they perceive as having no relation to their academic responsibilities (e.g., Netflix, TikTok). This may suggest that there is exhaustion on their part from using social media sites that are now saturated with academic content, hence the need for them to look for other means to relax.

The findings of the current study were also consistent with past research. Social media for online learning has become a platform for clarifications, asking of questions, setting of schedules for group meetings, and the like (Hrastinski & Aghaee, 2011). In the subtheme *Information Dissemination*, the participants spoke of the ease of exchange of information via social media, given that the platforms are convenient to use and are accessible and available to most people.

Additionally, previous studies reported that there is less cognitive engagement among students because they find it difficult to focus on online lectures (Aguilera-Hermida, 2020). This is evident in the subtheme *Distractions* and *Attention Span*, where participants reported that it is easy to switch their attention from academic matters to entertainment and leisure, which is facilitated by the use of social media for both domains. The lack of separation online between their academic and personal domains have made the participants more vulnerable to various distractions while studying.

Prior to conducting the participant interviews, it was unclear whether or not Filipino undergraduate students also experience the same challenges faced by work-from-home employees, whose social media usage for both work and personal

life have negatively impacted their work-life balance (Walden, 2016; Van Zoonen et al., 2017). The results of the current study revealed that undergraduate students do face the same challenges, as observed in their statements about the boundaries between their personal and academic lives being blurred by social media usage. The experience of being connected for almost 24 hours every day, which is facilitated by social media, may lead to one's work demands intruding their private domain (Bucher et al., 2013). Conversations related to schoolwork that continue during a student's time off are an example of how social media usage for work can invade one's personal life and recreation time (Bucher et al., 2013). Such findings from past literature are consistent with the results from the current study, with some participants feeling overwhelmed with the setup of using social media for both leisure and academic purposes. Nonetheless, some were able to cope with this conflict, such as having strict working hours allocated for attending to academic obligations only, as well as creating separate social media accounts for school and for personal life.

The issue on social media usage for online learning is nuanced. It could be argued that social media usage is generally widespread enough that it can be expected of most students. However, this attitude may be incorrect when it comes to certain people who may not have the means or even the inclination to engage with the systems. On the whole, it is good that the option exists, but to paraphrase what one participant said, the pros do not currently outweigh the cons at this time.

The study has several limitations. First, despite gathering undergraduate students from both public and private universities to create a more representative sample, all of the participants came from schools based in Metro Manila. Data from students studying in other parts of the country were not available, so there is a lack of knowledge regarding their experiences on social media usage for online learning. As such, precaution should be taken when generalizing the results of the study for the entire country.

Second, the socioeconomic status of the participants were not as diverse, with most of them belonging to the middle class. Their socioeconomic status may influence their adjustment, coping, and general experience of using social media for online learning. This was evident with how the participants shared in the interviews that they have

the means to access the resources needed for online learning, while pointing out that other students may not be able to do so. Getting a more representative sample by taking into consideration the students' socioeconomic status may result in more comprehensive findings in terms of their experiences on social media usage for online learning.

Lastly, the study only focused on exploring the experiences of undergraduate students in social media usage for online learning. It was not able to further investigate other factors as to why most of the participants believe that social media usage for online learning is not effective. Some participants have mentioned a few factors such as distractions, but not much has been explored aside from that. As such, other factors as to why online learning may not be effective for Filipino undergraduate students need more in-depth investigation.

As this study discovered several grounds regarding the experiences of undergraduate students in online learning, efforts for resolutions should be considered to increase the effectiveness of the new learning system during the pandemic. As such, the government should focus more on providing accessible and efficient internet connection for everyone, especially now that online learning relies heavily on internet connectivity. Educational institutions should acknowledge the existence of various learning management systems and encourage educators to put it into practice through seminars and workshops. Furthermore, future researchers may focus on other aspects of online learning during the pandemic as the current study only focused on the usage of social media for undergraduate students. They may also study whether certain variables, like motivation and self-efficacy, can influence the students' experiences of online learning during the pandemic.

Conclusion

Overall, this study was able to explore the various experiences of Filipino undergraduate students in terms of using social media for online learning during the pandemic. COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented changes in the educational landscape in the Philippines. Public and private universities have shifted to online learning mode to resume classes for undergraduate students, which has drastically changed the way students and teachers learn and communicate with each other.

However, as students continue their studies in their homes, they have also experienced several challenges that have affected their daily routine and their mental health. They have struggled concentrating on their lessons because of various internal and external factors, and their exhaustion has led them to simply accept that this is the current state of the education system. Nonetheless, positives can be taken from the findings in such a way that participants are still able to find small ways to manage their student life and cope with the challenges they encounter in the online setup.

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